How Representative Are the Fragile Families Study Families?: A Comparison of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort and Fragile Families Samples

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Abstract

This working paper assesses the representativeness of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study sample. It compares the demographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics of children and families participating in the Fragile Families Study to those of the children and families participating in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort of 2001 (ECLS-B). Although the characteristics of the children and families from the Fragile Families Study were generally similar to those of the children and families from the ECLS-B, there were important differences between the samples of these two studies. Families in the Fragile Families Study reported lower household incomes and parents reported lower earnings, fewer years of completed education, and were more likely to be African American and less likely to be non-Hispanic white. Differences between the Fragile Families Study and ECLS-B samples reflect the competing strengths and weaknesses of their respective sampling and data collection strategies.

Introduction

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study has followed a cohort of children born in large cities between 1998 and 2000 from birth through age 9 years. The goals of the Fragile Families study were to accurately describe the conditions and capacities of parents (especially, unmarried parents and non-resident fathers), the relationship between parents, and how social environments and public policies affect the wellbeing of parents and children. Parents from nearly 5,000 families in 20 large cities have been interviewed about their attitudes, relationships, parenting behavior, demographic characteristics, mental and physical health, income and employment, neighborhood characteristics, and program participation.

This working paper compares the demographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics of children and families who participated in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to those of the children and families who participated in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort of 2001. The aim of this study is to evaluate how the sampling and data collection design of the Fragile Families Study has influenced the representativeness of the study's sample. This paper begins by briefly describing the research aims of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies, how the disparate aims of these studies influenced their sampling and data collection designs, and how these research design decisions have likely influenced the representativeness of their respective samples. After briefly describing the design of these two major birth cohort studies, this working paper examines how the samples of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies differ. Finally, this paper concludes with a discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B study designs, and draws some conclusions about the generalizability of research findings from these studies.

Differences between the Research Designs of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the ECLS-B Study

The sampling and data collection designs of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies differed in part because these studies had overlapping but different aims and objectives. The

Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study aimed to better understand the relationship between parents, especially unmarried and non-resident parents; the relationships between resident and non-resident parents and their children; and how these relationships influenced parent and child wellbeing. The principal objectives of the ECLS-B were somewhat broader, by comparison, with the study aiming to better understand how families, schools and child care providers, and neighborhoods and communities influenced children's early development, mental and physical well-being, and readiness for school.

Because of their different aims and objectives, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the ECLS-B have somewhat different target populations. The Fragile Families Study was designed to be representative of births in cities with a population of 200,000 or more people since the majority of non-marital births occur in cities and their surrounding suburbs (Household and Family Characteristics, Census Bureau, March 1998, Table 4). The target population for the ECLS-B was noticeably broader since the study was intended to improve our understanding of more general processes of educational stratification. The ECLS-B was designed to be representative of all births to women age 15 years or older in the United States in 2001.

The remainder of this section provides an overview of the sampling and data collection designs of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies. More detailed information about the research design of the Fragile Families Study is available from Reichman et al. (2001). More in-depth information about the design of the ECLS-B study is available from Snow et al. (2007) and Bethel et al. (2005).

Sampling Designs

Both the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the ECLS-B used complex, multi-stage clustered sampling designs. In the first stage of the Fragile Families Study sampling design, the 77 U.S. cities with a population of 200,000 or more people were stratified by their welfare generosity, the strength of their child support enforcement system, and the strength of the local labor market. A total of 16 cities were selected for participation, with 8 cities with very high or low levels of welfare generosity, child support enforcement, and/or unemployment and

job growth and 8 cities with moderate levels on all these factors being selected for inclusion. The cities selected for inclusion included: Indianapolis, IN; Austin, TX; Boston, MA; San Jose, CA; Richmond, VA; Corpus Christi, TX; Toledo, OH; New York, NY; Baltimore, MD; Pittsburgh, PA; Nashville, TN; Norfolk, VA; Jacksonville, FL; San Antonio, TX; Philadelphia, PA; and Chicago, IL.[1] In the second stage, birthing hospitals within the selected cities were sampled. In cities such as Oakland, Austin, and Newark with a small number of birthing hospitals, all eligible hospitals were included. In most of the remaining cities, birthing hospitals were rank-ordered on the basis of the number of non-marital births, and hospitals were selected starting with the largest hospital in terms of the number of non-marital births until 75% of the non-marital births in the city were covered. In a few very large cities with a large number of birthing hospitals such as New York and Chicago, hospitals with over 1,000 non-marital births per year were randomly selected for inclusion. In the final stage, random samples of marital and non-marital births from each hospital were selected for participation. In each of the 8 cities with extreme values on one or more of the stratifying variables, 325 births (250 non-marital, 75 marital) were selected for participation in the study. In each of the 8 cities with moderate values on all of the stratifying variables, 100 births (75 non-marital, 25 marital) were selected for inclusion.

The ECLS-B selected a nationally representative probability sample of children born in 2001 from a list of eligible births from the National Center for Health Statistics vital statistics system. In the first stage of the ECLS-B sampling design, a stratified random sample of county groups was selected for inclusion. These primary sampling units (PSU) were stratified by region, median household income, proportion minority population, and metro versus non-metro area. In some large, geographically-dispersed PSUs, one or more counties were randomly selected to represent the PSU. In the second stage, a stratified random sample of births was selected for participation. Births were initially stratified by race/ethnicity (American Indian, Chinese, Other

[1] In addition to these 16 cities in the national sample, four additional cities (Newark, NJ; Oakland, CA; Detroit, MI; and San Jose, CA) were also included in the study. These four cities, along with the 16 cities in the national sample, comprised the city sample. Interviews were also conducted in Milwaukee, WI because of its unique policy history and environment. Study participants from Milwaukee are not considered to be members of either the national or city samples.

Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black, non-Hispanic, White, non-Hispanic). Subsequent samples of births stratified by birth weight (very low birth weight, moderately low birth weight infants) and twin status (twin, not a twin) were selected for participation.

Data Collection Designs

The Fragile Families and ECLS-B data collection designs also differed, in part, because the studies had different aims and emphases. The Fragile Families Study interviewed both mothers and fathers in the hospital shortly after the birth of their children because the research team discovered that there was a "magic moment" after the child's birth when unwed fathers are present and willing to be interviewed. Fathers not able to be interviewed at the hospital were subsequently interviewed by telephone. The ECLS-B initially interviewed mothers and fathers and assessed children about 9 months after the child's birth. Data from mothers was collected through computer-assisted personal interviewing and through a self-administered questionnaire conducted in the child's home. Fathers completed self-administered questionnaires. Children were assessed during the home visit.

Differences in the sampling and data collection designs of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies are likely to have influenced the representativeness of their samples, albeit in different ways. The sampling strategy pursued by the Fragile Families Study, for example, is likely to have resulted in a sample of marital births in which births to more socially- and economically-advantaged married parent are underrepresented. To the extent that more advantaged single mothers are also more likely to give birth in suburban hospitals, non-marital births to more affluent single mothers may also have been underrepresented in the Fragile Families Study. Conversely, the ECLS-B research design is likely to have resulted in a sample of marital and non-marital births in which less socially- and economically advantaged families were underrepresented. Less advantaged families are likely to have been underrepresented because response rates for individuals with less education and less socially and economically advantaged families tend to be significantly lower than for more advantaged individuals and families (Groves and Couper 1998; Lepkowski and Couper 2002; Rizzo, Kalton and Brick 1994; Zabel

1998). Non-resident fathers were especially likely to be underrepresented in the ECLS-B since past studies have found that it is very difficult to collect data on unwed fathers.

Data and Methods

Data and Samples

In this study, I used the baseline waves of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the ECLS-B to compare sample demographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics. Baseline data for the Fragile Families Study was collected from mothers and fathers at the hospital shortly after the birth of the focal child. Data for the initial wave of the Fragile Families Study was collected between 1998 and 2000. A total of 4,898 families participated in the initial wave of data collection. The Fragile Families Study national sample includes 3,442 families and the city sample includes 4,789 families. The response rate for mothers for the baseline survey was 86% and the response rate for fathers for the baseline survey was 78%.[2]

The ECLS-B selected for participation a sample of children born in the United States during the calendar year of 2001. Information from mothers and fathers for the baseline wave was collected when the focal child was about 9 months old, with data collection for this initial wave occurring between the fall of 2001 and the fall of 2002. The baseline wave of the ECLS-B includes information on 10,690 children. The response rate for the parent questionnaire for the initial wave of the study was 77% (Snow et al. 2007). The response rates for the resident and non-resident father questionnaires for the initial wave of the ECLS-B were 58% and 42%, respectively (Bethel et al. 2005).

All participating families from the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies were included in this analysis. The target populations for the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies were notably different. The Fragile Families Study national sample was representative of births in cities with

[2] For more information about response rates for the Fragile Families Study see the "Introduction to the Fragile Families Public Use Data Baseline, One-Year, Three-Year, and Five-Year Core Telephone Data" (http://www.fragilefamilies. princeton.edu/ documentation/core/ 4waves_ff_public.pdf).

populations of 200,000 or more people.[3] The Fragile Families Study city sample was representative of births in the 20 cities with populations of 200,000 or more people selected for participation in the study. The ECLS-B sample was representative of all births to women age 15 years or older in the United States in 2001.[4] The study populations for the ECLS-B and the Fragile Families Study were not directly comparable because of these important differences between their target populations. In order to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the representativeness of the Fragile Families Study sample, this study compared the characteristics of the Fragile Families national and city samples both to the overall ECLS-B sample and two subsamples from the ECLS-B that represent, respectively, all study participants living in urban areas and all study participants livings in large cities. The ECLS-B Urban Areas subsample included all families living in Census Bureau defined urban areas, which consists of densely settled areas with populations of 50,000 or more people. The ECLS-B Large City subsample included all families living in counties that included a city with a population of 200,000 or more people.[5] The ECLS-B Large City subsample, although not perfectly equivalent, represents the target population most directly comparable to the Fragile Families national sample.

Measures

This study compared the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of parents and the health status of children and parents from the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies. Demographic characteristics included the focal child's mother's and father's age, number of children, race and ethnicity, and educational attainment and the father's nativity. Mother's and

[3] Families were excluded from the sampling frame if their child died, they planned to place the child for adoption, the biological father was deceased, the parents did not speak English or Spanish well enough to complete the interview, or the mother was too ill to complete the interview (or her baby was too ill for the mother to complete the interview). Additionally, approximately 2/3 of the participating hospitals prohibited the interviewing of parents less than 18 years old.

[4] Children who died or who were adopted prior to the 9-month assessment were also excluded from the sampling frame.

[5] The Large City subsample was defined on the basis of county FIPS codes because FIPS place codes, which would have made it possible to identify families living in cities with populations of 200,000 or more people, were not available in the ECLS-B. For the small number of large cities with boundaries that fell within two or more counties only the county that was the predominant location of the city was included in the subsample to avoid including principally suburban counties.

father's *Age* indicates the age (in years) of the child's biological parents at the time the child was born and mother's and father's *Number of Children* indicates the number of biological children the child's mother and father, respectively, reported having. *White, Non-Hispanic*, *Black, Non-Hispanic, Hispanic,* and *Other Race, Non-Hispanic* are a series of dummy variables representing the child's mother's and father's racial and ethnic background. *No High School Degree, High School Graduate, Some College,* and *College Graduate* are a set of dummy variables indicating the highest level of schooling completed by the child's mother and father. *Father Born in the United States* is a dummy variable reflecting whether or not the child's father was born in the U.S.[6]

Socioeconomic characteristics included household income and poverty status and the father's employment status, hours worked, and earnings. Both continuous and categorical measures of household income were examined in this study. The continuous measure of household income represented household income in constant year 2001 dollars.[7] A categorical measure of household income recoded household income into the following categories: *$0-$15,000, $15,001-$25,000, $25,001-$35,000, $35,001-$50,000, $50,001-$100,000,* and *$100,001 or more*). *Poverty Status* is a dummy variable indicating whether or not household income was below the official poverty threshold. Father's *Employment Status* is a dummy variable representing whether or not the child's father worked for pay during the previous week and the father's *Hours Worked* indicates the number of hours the respondent usually worked per week. Both continuous and categorical measures of father's annual earnings were examined in this study. The continuous measure of annual earnings represents the father's earnings in constant year 2001 dollars.[8] A categorical measure of father's earnings recoded earnings into the

[6] The nativity of the mother was not included in this analysis because country of origin and citizenship status for the mother was not available in the ECLS-B.

[7] For the Fragile Families Study, the constructed measure of household income with imputed values was used as a continuous measure of household income. For the ECLS-B, respondents were assigned the midpoint value for their household income interval, with the mean for the top-coded category assumed to follow a Pareto distribution. The average Consumer Price Index for a given calendar year was used to recode household income into constant year 2001 dollars.

[8] For the ECLS-B study, a continuous measure of father's annual earnings was able to be constructed from fathers' reports of their salary. For the Fragile Families Study, respondents were assigned the midpoint value for their annual

following categories: *$0-$15,000, $15,001-$25,000, $25,001-$50,000, $50,001-$75,000,* and *$75,001 or more*). Because information about the earnings of non-resident fathers was not available in the ECLS-B, this measure of father's earnings only included information about resident fathers. A more detailed categorization of household income and father's earnings was employed in the cumulative distribution plots that portray the overall distribution of income and earnings for the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies.

Health characteristics included the mother's and father's health status and the child's birth weight. *Excellent Health, Very Good Health, Good Health,* and *Fair or Poor Health* are series dummy variables indicating the mother's and the father's subjective assessment of their current health. Low Birth Weight is a dummy variable reflecting whether or not the child weighted less than 2,500 grams at birth.

Analytic Strategy

Several different strategies for comparing the characteristics of Fragile Families Study and ECLS-B study participants were pursued in this study. First, independent sample t-tests were used to compare the characteristics parents, children, and families from the Fragile Families national sample to (1) the overall ECLS-B sample, (2) the ECLS-B large city subsample, (3) the ECLS-B urban areas subsample, and (4) the Fragile Families city sample. Second, independent sample t-tests were used to compare the characteristics of parents, children, and families from the Fragile Families national sample to the ECLS-B large city subsample separately for married parent families, cohabiting parent families, and families in which the child's biological parents were neither married nor cohabiting at the time of the child's birth. Because both the Fragile Families and the ECLS-B studies employed complex survey sampling designs all statistics and their associated standard errors were computed using sampling weights and procedures that account for the unequal probabilities of selection for study participants and for the multistage

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earnings interval, with the mean for the top-coded category assumed to follow a Pareto distribution. The average Consumer Price Index for a given calendar year was used to recode earnings into constant year 2001 dollars.

stratified and clustered sampling designs of these studies.[9] Missing data on individual items were listwise deleted to avoid having differences in the imputation models between studies influence the results presented here and to facilitate the replication of these findings.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 displays means and standard errors for selected demographic characteristics for mothers and fathers from the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies. Significance tests indicate differences between the Fragile Families Study national sample and, respectively, the ECLS-B full sample, the ECLS-B large city subsample, the ECLS-B urban areas subsample, and the Fragile Families city sample. The ECLS-B large city subsample is the sample most directly comparable to the Fragile Families national sample. Results for the ECLS-B urban areas subsample and the full ECLS-B sample were included in order to evaluate the ways in which the Fragile Families national sample was similar to and different from on one hand a broader sample of urban areas and on the other hand a nationally representative sample.

<Table 1>

Parents in the Fragile Families Study reported fewer years of completed education and were more likely to be African American and less likely to be non-Hispanic white than parents in the ECLS-B, but were of similar age and had similar numbers of biological children. Fathers in the Fragile Families Study were more likely to have been born in the U.S. In the Fragile Families Study national sample, 39.7% of mothers were non-Hispanic white, 22.8% were non-Hispanic black, 29.8% were Hispanic, and 7.7% were of some other race or ethnicity. By comparison,

[9] A jackknife repeated replication procedure was used to estimate standard errors for the Fragile Families Study and a Taylor Series Linearization procedure was used to estimate standard errors for the ECLS-B. The weights employed in these analyses depended on the characteristic being examined. In the Fragile Families Study, father replicate weights (f1natwt_rep1-f1natwt_rep33 and f1citywt_rep1-f1citywt_rep33) were used for father characteristics and mother replicate weights (m1natwt_rep1-m1natwt_rep33 and m1citywt_rep1-m1citywt_rep33) were used for mother, family, and child characteristics since these measures came from the mother interview. In the ECLS-B, the child weight (W1C0) was used for child characteristics, the father weight (W1F0) was used for father characteristics, and the respondent weight (W1R0) was used for all other characteristics.

46.1% of mothers in the ECLS-B large city subsample were non-Hispanic white, 16.7% were non-Hispanic black, 31.3% were Hispanic, and 5.9% were of some other race or ethnicity. Fathers from the Fragile Families national sample were also more likely to be non-Hispanic black (19.7% vs. 13.3%) than father's from the ECLS-B large city subsample. Differences between the racial and ethnic backgrounds of mothers and fathers from the ECLS-B full sample and urban areas subsample, respectively, and the Fragile Families Study national sample were generally starker, with more than 60% of parents in the ECLS-B full sample and more than 50% of parents in the ECLS-B urban areas subsample having reported their race as non-Hispanic white and less than 15% of parents in the ECLS-B full sample and less than 17% of parents in the ECLS-B urban areas subsample having reported their race as non-Hispanic black.

Parents in the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies also differed in their educational attainment. In the Fragile Families national sample, 33.4% of mothers had not completed high school, 24.5% had graduated high school, 19.9% had attended college, and 22.2% had graduated from college. In contrast, in the ECLS-B large city subsample, 23.4% of mothers had not completed high school, 30.0% had graduated high school, 20.6% had attended college, and 26.0% had graduated from college. Educational attainment for fathers from the Fragile Families national sample and the ECLS-B large city subsample was more similar than for mothers, with comparable proportions of fathers having failed to complete high school (22.2% vs. 25.2%) and having attended college (28.7% vs. 26.8%). Fathers in the ECLS-B large city subsample were, however, more likely to have graduated from college (29.1% vs. 21.3%) and less likely to have graduated from high school (18.8% vs. 27.8%) than fathers from the Fragile Families Study. Relative to the ECLS-B large city subsample, parents in the ECLS-B urban areas subsample were generally somewhat more educated and parents in the full ECLS-B sample were somewhat less educated.

These differences between the Fragile Families Study and ECLS-B samples may, in part, reflect differences in the family structure composition of these studies' samples. In the Fragile Families Study national sample, 60.2% of families were married, 19.8% were cohabiting, and

23.8% were neither married nor cohabiting. In the ECLS-B subsample, 64.5% of families were married, 11.7% were cohabiting, and 23.8% were neither married nor cohabiting. Table 2, therefore, presents means and standard errors for parents' demographic characteristics for the Fragile Families national sample and the ECLS-B large city subsample by family type.

<Table 2>

Differences between the Fragile Families Study national sample and the ECLS-B large city subsample are generally less stark within family types. Married mothers from the ECLS-B were more likely to be non-Hispanic whites (58.5% vs. 51.0%) than married mothers in the Fragile Families Study, and less likely to be non-Hispanic blacks (7.2% vs. 12.1%), to be from some other race or ethnicity (7.8% vs. 10.5%), and to have dropped out of high school (13.6% vs. 21.7%). They were not, however, significantly more likely to be older, to have had more children, to be Hispanic, to have graduated from high school, or to have attended or graduated from college. Married fathers from the ECLS-B were more likely to have graduated from college (39.2% vs. 27.7%), and less likely to be non-Hispanic blacks (9.2% vs. 14.6%), to have graduated from high school (14.4% vs. 23.2%), and to have been born in the U.S. (69.8% vs. 77.3%).

Cohabiting parents from the Fragile Families Study were more likely to be non-Hispanic blacks (mothers: 28.9% vs. 16.3%; fathers: 33.7% vs. 19.2%) and less likely to be Hispanics (mothers: 28.9% vs. 16.3%; fathers: 33.7% vs. 19.2%). Mothers from the Fragile Families Study were less likely to have graduated from college (2.6% vs. 7.8%). Fathers were more likely to have born in the U.S. (83.6% vs. 56.9%) and to have graduated from high school (40.4% vs. 25.9%), and less likely to have dropped out of high school (35.7% vs. 46.9%).

Differences between the Fragile Families Study national sample and the ECLS-B large city subsample are generally greater for families in which children's biological parents were neither married nor cohabiting than for married and cohabiting couples. Parents from the Fragile Families Study who were neither married nor cohabiting were more likely to be non-Hispanic blacks (mothers: 50.2% vs. 40.8%; fathers: 58.9% vs. 31.6%) and less likely to be non-Hispanics

whites (mothers: 17.0% vs. 25.1%; fathers: 12.3% vs. 27.8%) than parents from the ECLS-B who were neither married nor cohabiting. Non-resident fathers from the Fragile Families Study were also less likely to be Hispanics (22.3% vs. 38.1%). Single mothers from the Fragile Families Study were more likely to have dropped out of high school (56.2% vs. 38.0%) and less likely to have graduated from high school (26.1% vs. 40.3%) or college (2.5% vs. 6.3%). Non-resident fathers from the Fragile Families Study were less likely to have attended college (17.2% vs. 26.9%) and somewhat more likely to have dropped out of high school (44.9% vs. 36.6%; t=-1.87, p=0.06).

Socioeconomic Characteristics

Table 3 displays means and standard errors for the socioeconomic characteristics of children's families for the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies, and Table 4 presents means and standard errors for the these characteristics by family type for the Fragile Families national sample and the ECLS-B large city subsample. Fragile Families Study families had lower mean incomes ($44,553 vs. $53,872) than ECLS-B families. They were, however, not significantly more likely to be poor. Families in the more inclusive ECLS-B urban areas subsample had slightly higher mean incomes ($54,918) -than families in the ECLS-B large cities sample. Families in the full ECLS-B sample had slightly lower mean incomes ($51,182) than families in the ECLS-B large cities sample.

<Table 3>

<Table 4>

Mean household incomes for Fragile Families Study families were significantly lower than those for ECLS-B families for all family types. Married families from the Fragile Families Study had a mean household income of $58,142 while married families from the ECLS-B had a mean household income of $69,112. Cohabiting Fragile Families Study families had a mean household income of $27,438 whereas ECLS-B cohabiting families had a mean household income of $31,800. Families where the mother and father were neither married nor cohabiting

also had lower household incomes on average in the Fragile Families Study than they did in the ECLS-B ($18,867 vs. $26,654).

Mean household incomes, both overall and for specific family types, were noticeably lower in the Fragile Families Study than they were in the ECLS-B. In order to better understand how the distribution of household incomes differs between these studies, Figure 1 plots the cumulative probability distributions for household income for these studies both overall and for married, cohabiting, and single parent families. Although mean household incomes were significantly lower in the Fragile Families Study, the distributions of household income – with the exception of the distribution for single parent families – were quite similar for the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies. Low earners were somewhat overrepresented, relative to the ECLS-B large city subsample, in the Fragile Families Study national sample. A noticeably higher proportion of families in the Fragile Families Study than in the ECLS-B had incomes below $25,000. Nonetheless, the distribution of income above $25,000, both overall and for married and cohabiting couples, in the Fragile Families Study were remarkably similar to those for the ECLS-B. For children living with their mothers but not their fathers, the distribution of household income for the Fragile Families Study was consistently lower than for the ECLS-B.

<Figure 1>

Fragile Families Study fathers were more likely to have been employed than ECLS-B fathers (92.8% vs. 85.2%), but they did not work significantly more. Resident fathers from the Fragile Families Study ($37,529) earned substantially less than resident fathers from the ECLS-B ($56,874).[10] Resident fathers from the Fragile Families Study were also much more likely to earn less than $15,000 (23.4%) than were resident fathers from the ECLS-B (8.5%), and they were much less likely to earn $75,000 or more (5.7% vs. 19.0%). Married fathers from the Fragile Families Study earned significantly less than married fathers from the ECLS-B ($42,987 vs. $62,341), and both married and cohabiting fathers from the Fragile Families Study were more

[10] Earnings for non-resident fathers could not be compared because the ECLS-B did not collect information about the salary and earnings of non-resident fathers.

likely to have earned less than $15,000 in the previous year (married: 15.3% vs. 5.9%; cohabiting: 45.2% vs. 25.9%) than were comparable fathers from the ECLS-B. Figure 2, which plots the cumulative probability distribution for fathers' earnings for both studies, shows that resident fathers from the Fragile Families Study were consistently poorer earners than resident fathers from the ECLS-B, with higher proportions of Fragile Families fathers having earned low incomes and lower proportions having earned high incomes.

<Figure 2>

Health Characteristics

Table 5 displays means and standard errors for parents' and children's health statuses from the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies. Table 6 presents means and standard errors for parents' and children's health statuses by family type for the Fragile Families national sample and the ECLS-B large city subsample. In general, there were few differences between the health of children and parents in the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies. Similar proportions of children in the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies had low birth weights, while a somewhat larger share of fathers (34.1% vs. 23.2%) and a somewhat smaller share of mothers (32.3% vs. 37.6%) from the Fragile Families Study reported being in excellent health. Children with married parents from the ECLS-B large city subsample were more likely than children with married parents from the Fragile Families Study national sample to have been low birth weight (7.2% vs, 4.2%), although children with cohabiting parents and single mothers had similar chances of having been low birth weight. Cohabiting mothers from the ECLS-B were more likely to have reported being in excellent health than cohabiting mothers from the Fragile Families Study (34.7% vs. 23.8%), but such mothers were less likely to have reported being in very good health (27.0% vs. 37.9%). Both married and cohabiting fathers from the Fragile Families Study were more likely to have reported being in excellent health than comparable fathers from the ECLS-B (married: 35.6% vs. 24.2%; cohabiting: 29.9% vs. 17.3%), but such fathers were less likely to have reported being in good health (married: 21.6% vs. 28.5%; cohabiting: 23.1% vs. 35.2%).

<Table 5>

<Table 6>

Discussion

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort of 2001 have provided new and unique information about children's early life family experiences and the influence that these experiences have on development. The sampling and data collection designs of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies differed in important ways. The Fragile Families Study selected a stratified random sample of cities with large populations, and then interviewed randomly chosen new mothers and fathers at all birthing hospitals or birthing hospitals with large numbers of non-marital births in these large cities. Interviews with mothers and fathers were conducted at the hospital shortly after the child's birth. The ECLS-B Study selected a stratified random sample of county groups, and then selected a stratified random sample of births within these counties from a list of all births in the area during the calendar year of 2001. Interviewers with mothers and fathers and assessments of the child were conducted when the child was around 9 months old.

This study examined how the demographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics of children and families participating in the Fragile Families Study differed from those of the children and families participating in the ECLS-B. Differences between the sampling and data collection designs of the Fragile Families and ECLS-B studies influenced the compositions of these studies' samples. Families in the Fragile Families Study reported lower mean household incomes. Parents in the Fragile Families Study reported fewer years of completed education and were more likely to be African American and less likely to be non-Hispanic white. Fathers in the Fragile Families studies were more likely to be in very good health and to be employed, but they earned less.

These differences between the demographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics of the Fragile Families Study and ECLS-B samples reflected the competing strengths and weaknesses of their respective sampling and data collection strategies. On one hand, participants

in the Fragile Families Study were socially and economically disadvantaged relative to participants in the ECLS-B study because the Fragile Families Study design aimed to minimize the forms of non-response bias that typically have resulted in the underrepresentation of poor individuals and families, especially non-resident fathers, in social surveys. By interviewing mothers and fathers at the hospital during the "magical moment" shortly after the birth of their child when they are both present and willing to talk about their relationship, their new child, and their attitudes and expectations, the Fragile Families Study was able to enroll many study participants who would have been unlikely to participate under other circumstances. On the other hand, participants in the Fragile Families Study were more disadvantaged than participants in the ECLS-B study at least partially because only births from city hospitals were eligible for participation in the Fragile Families Study.

Despite significant differences between the characteristics of children and families participating in the Fragile Families Study and the ECLS-B, the overall distribution of children and families from the Fragile Families Study was generally similar to the overall distribution of children and families from the ECLS-B. For example, although families from the Fragile Families had lower household incomes and a higher proportion of families with very low incomes, the overall distribution of household income for the two studies was remarkably similar. Likewise, while it is true that mothers and fathers in the Fragile Families Study were significantly more likely to have dropped out of high school and significantly less likely to have graduated from college, the Fragile Families Study nonetheless includes a large share of mothers and fathers who attended (~20%) or graduated from college (~20).

Researchers choosing between using the Fragile Families and ECLS-B data sets for their studies should consider several things. First, if their primary interest is disadvantaged families, the Fragile Families Study is the better option because of better coverage of low-income families. Second, if they are mainly interested in non-resident fathers, the Fragile Families Study is clearly the preferred option because of a much higher response rate for such fathers in the study. Third, if they are principally interested in more advantaged families or suburban and rural

families, the ECLS-B study is the better option because the ECLS-B sampled births not only in large cities but also in suburban and rural areas. Finally, this study recommends that researchers' using data from the Fragile Families Study include statistical controls for household income, parent education, and race and ethnicity in their studies given the significant differences documented in this study between the Fragile Families and ECLS-B samples.

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Table 1: Means and Standard Errors for Demographic Variables from Baseline Waves of ECLS-B and Fragile Families Study

	ECLS-B			Fragile Families Study	
	Full Sample	Large City Subsample	Urban Areas Subsample	National Sample	City Sample
Mother					
Age	26.544**	26.995	27.010	27.038	27.137
	(0.142)	(0.166)	(0.174)	(0.093)	(0.097)
Number of Children	2.026	2.067	2.019	2.053	2.125
	(0.018)	(0.031)	(0.020)	(0.046)	(0.074)
Race					
White, Non-Hispanic	0.601***	0.461**	0.535***	0.397	0.299***
	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.018)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Black, Non-Hispanic	0.146***	0.167***	0.165***	0.228	0.344***
	(0.009)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.004)	(0.010)
Hispanic	0.210***	0.313	0.251**	0.298	0.288
	(0.012)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.002)
Other Race, Non-Hispanic	0.043***	0.059*	0.049***	0.077	0.070
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.006)	(0.009)
Education					
No High School Degree	0.217***	0.234***	0.218***	0.334	0.338
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.008)
High School Graduate	0.316***	0.300**	0.289**	0.245	0.264
	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.010)
Some College	0.216*	0.206	0.213	0.199	0.196
	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.004)	(0.006)
College Graduate	0.252*	0.260*	0.279***	0.222	0.202*
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.008)	(0.005)
Father					
Age	29.745*	30.196	30.142	30.614	30.566
	(0.144)	(0.208)	(0.172)	(0.314)	(0.315)
Number of Children	2.051	2.077	2.029	2.166	2.140
	(0.023)	(0.039)	(0.027)	(0.081)	(0.110)
Race					
White, Non-Hispanic	0.624***	0.488	0.561***	0.444	0.336***
	(0.016)	(0.025)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.021)
Black, Non-Hispanic	0.118***	0.133***	0.133***	0.197	0.257***
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Hispanic	0.217***	0.321	0.258*	0.312	0.336
	(0.013)	(0.025)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.020)
Other Race, Non-Hispanic	0.040	0.058	0.048	0.047	0.070
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Education					
No High School Degree	0.229	0.252	0.221	0.222	0.258
	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.022)	(0.018)
High School Graduate	0.220*	0.188***	0.198***	0.278	0.260
	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Some College	0.287	0.268	0.280	0.287	0.211*
	(0.007)	(0.013)	(0.008)	(0.026)	(0.018)
College Graduate	0.264**	0.291***	0.301***	0.213	0.271**
	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Born in United States	0.784	0.702***	0.736**	0.790	0.695**
	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.033)

Note: Significance tests indicate differences between the specified sample or subsample and Fragile Families Study National Sample.
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2: Means and Standard Errors for Demographic Variables from Baseline Waves of ECLS-B and Fragile Families Study, By Family Type: Cities with Populations of 200,000 or More

	Married to Father		Cohabiting with Father		Neither Married nor Cohabiting with Father	
	ECLS-B	FFS	ECLS-B	FFS	ECLS-B	FFS
Mother						
Age	29.098	29.180	24.094	24.604	23.241	22.729
	(0.154)	(0.209)	(0.298)	(0.391)	(0.195)	(0.319)
Number of Children	2.154	2.058	2.002	2.187	1.879	1.904
	(0.040)	(0.069)	(0.064)	(0.116)	(0.055)	(0.061)
Race						
White, Non-Hispanic	0.585**	0.510	0.254	0.270	0.251*	0.170
	(0.024)	(0.015)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Black, Non-Hispanic	0.072***	0.121	0.163***	0.289	0.408*	0.502
	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.022)	(0.025)	(0.033)	(0.035)
Hispanic	0.265	0.264	0.551***	0.404	0.314	0.298
	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.030)
Other Race, Non-Hispanic	0.078*	0.105	0.033	0.037	0.027	0.030
	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.004)	(0.014)	(0.004)	(0.009)
Education						
No High School Degree	0.136***	0.217	0.425	0.473	0.380***	0.562
	(0.009)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.033)	(0.021)	(0.030)
High School Graduate	0.243	0.215	0.374	0.326	0.403***	0.261
	(0.012)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.034)	(0.022)	(0.029)
Some College	0.245	0.221	0.123	0.175	0.154	0.153
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.018)
College Graduate	0.376	0.347	0.078**	0.026	0.063**	0.025
	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.008)
Father						
Age	32.654	31.777	27.317	27.477	26.600	25.316
	(0.216)	(0.433)	(0.396)	(0.376)	(0.501)	(0.730)
Number of Children	2.116	2.191	2.049	2.097	1.908	1.776
	(0.046)	(0.110)	(0.096)	(0.084)	(0.107)	(0.086)
Race						
White, Non-Hispanic	0.582	0.516	0.178	0.249	0.278**	0.123
	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.043)	(0.028)
Black, Non-Hispanic	0.092**	0.146	0.192***	0.337	0.316***	0.589
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.045)	(0.037)
Hispanic	0.258	0.287	0.602***	0.380	0.381*	0.223
	(0.026)	(0.020)	(0.037)	(0.031)	(0.057)	(0.030)
Other Race, Non-Hispanic	0.069	0.051	0.027	0.034	0.026	0.065
	(0.004)	(0.012)	(0.006)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.027)
Education						
No High School Degree	0.183	0.172	0.469*	0.357	0.366	0.449
	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.043)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.029)
High School Graduate	0.144**	0.232	0.259**	0.404	0.318	0.342
	(0.011)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.030)
Some College	0.281	0.319	0.207	0.199	0.269*	0.172
	(0.015)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.035)	(0.029)
College Graduate	0.392***	0.277	0.065	0.040	0.047	0.038
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Born in United States	0.698*	0.773	0.569***	0.836	0.831	0.881
	(0.020)	(0.023)	(0.042)	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.025)

Note: Significance tests indicate differences between the ECLS-B Large City Subsample and Fragile Families Study National Sample.
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3: Means and Standard Errors for Socioeconomic Variables from Baseline Waves of ECLS-B and Fragile Families Study

	ECLS-B			Fragile Families Study	
	Full Sample	Large City Subsample	Urban Areas Subsample	National Sample	City Sample
Family					
Household Income (cont.)	51,182***	53,872***	54,918***	44,553	44,496
	(1,368)	(1,743)	(1,697)	(1,406)	(770)
Household Income (cat.)					
$0-$15,000	0.182***	0.186***	0.169***	0.258	0.279
	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.017)
$15,001-$25,000	0.173	0.173	0.160	0.163	0.192
	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.017)	(0.022)
$25,001-$35,000	0.141**	0.134*	0.136*	0.099	0.124
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.014)	(0.011)
$35,001-$50,000	0.149	0.136	0.145	0.157	0.105*
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.018)	(0.010)
$50,001-$100,000	0.252**	0.254**	0.269***	0.191	0.142
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.021)
$100,001 or more	0.102*	0.117	0.121	0.131	0.157
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.005)
Poverty Status	0.243	0.251	0.230	0.262	0.267
	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Father					
Employment Status	0.860***	0.852***	0.860***	0.928	0.902
	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.012)
Hours Worked	46.059	45.816	45.828	45.503	44.664
	(0.228)	(0.339)	(0.269)	(0.363)	(0.478)
Earnings (cont.)[a]	52,886***	56,874***	57,568***	37,529	41,956
	(1,955)	(2,673)	(2,370)	(1,670)	(2,097)
Earnings (cat.)[a]					
$0-$15,000	0.088***	0.085***	0.080***	0.234	0.259
	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.023)	(0.028)
$15,001-$25,000	0.223	0.207	0.196	0.211	0.209
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.021)	(0.024)
$25,001-$50,000	0.366	0.342	0.349	0.342	0.286
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.027)	(0.019)
$50,001-$75,000	0.159	0.176	0.177	0.156	0.136
	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.022)	(0.030)
$75,001 or more	0.164***	0.190***	0.197***	0.057	0.109***
	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.015)

Note: Significance tests indicate differences between the specified sample or subsample and Fragile Families Study National Sample.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

[a] Earnings information not available for non-resident fathers in ECLS-B.

Table 4: Means and Standard Errors for Socioeconomic Variables from Baseline Waves of ECLS-B and Fragile Families Study, By Family Type: Cities with Populations of 200,000 or More

	Married to Father		Cohabiting with Father		Neither Married nor Cohabiting with Father	
	ECLS-B	FFS	ECLS-B	FFS	ECLS-B	FFS
Family						
Household Income (cont.)	69,112***	58,142	31,800*	27,438	26,654***	18,867
	(2,068)	(2,201)	(1,789)	(0,988)	(1,615)	(1,480)
Household Income (cat.)						
$0-$15,000	0.076*	0.137	0.263*	0.350	0.423***	0.553
	(0.009)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.033)
$15,001-$25,000	0.122	0.130	0.277	0.251	0.249*	0.193
	(0.009)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.019)
$25,001-$35,000	0.126	0.082	0.183	0.158	0.129	0.099
	(0.009)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.014)	(0.017)
$35,001-$50,000	0.155	0.199	0.130	0.118	0.093	0.093
	(0.010)	(0.028)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.013)
$50,001-$100,000	0.351*	0.263	0.117	0.099	0.081	0.046
	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.014)
$100,001 or more	0.170	0.189	0.030	0.025	0.026	0.016
	(0.012)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Poverty Status	0.125	0.147	0.387	0.315	0.499	0.568
	(0.010)	(0.025)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.034)
Father						
Employment Status	0.903*	0.955	0.742**	0.853	0.729	0.659
	(0.011)	(0.021)	(0.032)	(0.026)	(0.033)	(0.036)
Hours Worked	46.812	46.069	43.928	43.976	42.316	41.134
	(0.340)	(0.603)	(1.013)	(0.754)	(0.804)	(0.875)
Earnings (cont.)[a]	62,341***	42,987	29,053	22,809	--	--
	(3,075)	(1,996)	(4,270)	(1,629)	--	--
Earnings (cat.)[a]						
$0-$15,000	0.059***	0.153	0.259***	0.452	--	--
	(0.010)	(0.028)	(0.046)	(0.032)	--	--
$15,001-$25,000	0.171	0.195	0.377*	0.253	--	--
	(0.013)	(0.028)	(0.050)	(0.029)	--	--
$25,001-$50,000	0.345	0.380	0.314	0.240	--	--
	(0.017)	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.025)	--	--
$50,001-$75,000	0.204	0.200	0.030	0.039	--	--
	(0.015)	(0.030)	(0.012)	(0.014)	--	--
$75,001 or more	0.221***	0.072	0.019	0.016	--	--
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.009)	--	--

Note: Significance tests indicate differences between the ECLS-B Large City Subsample and Fragile Families Study National Sample.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

[a] Earnings information not available for non-resident fathers in ECLS-B.

Table 5: Means and Standard Errors for Health Variables from Baseline Waves of ECLS-B and Fragile Families Study

	ECLS-B			Fragile Families Study	
	Full Sample	Large City Subsample	Urban Areas Subsample	National Sample	City Sample
Child					
Low Birthweight	0.077	0.082	0.077	0.068	0.085
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.012)	(0.009)
Mother					
Health Status					
Excellent Health	0.353	0.376*	0.360	0.323	0.328
	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Very Good Health	0.335	0.324	0.337	0.376	0.366
	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.025)	(0.035)
Good Health	0.240	0.231	0.234	0.232	0.229
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.020)	(0.018)
Fair or Poor Health	0.071	0.068	0.070	0.069	0.076
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.014)	(0.014)
*Father**					
Health Status					
Excellent Health	0.236***	0.232***	0.241**	0.341	0.349
	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Very Good Health	0.408	0.407	0.408	0.386	0.370
	(0.009)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.028)	(0.025)
Good Health	0.294**	0.296**	0.293**	0.220	0.218
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.023)	(0.027)
Fair or Poor Health	0.062	0.065	0.058	0.053	0.063
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.016)

Note: Significance tests indicate differences between the specified sample or subsample and Fragile Families Study National Sample.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

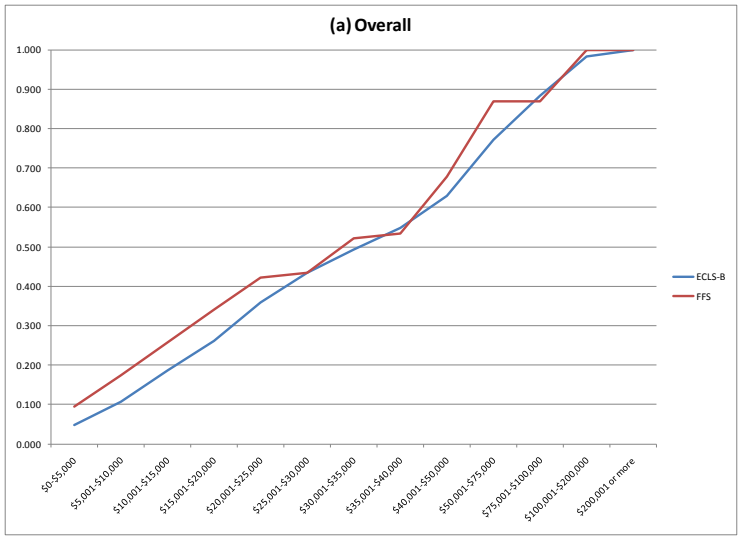
Table 6: Means and Standard Errors for Health Variables from Baseline Waves of ECLS-B and Fragile Families Study, By Family Type: Cities with Populations of 200,000 or More

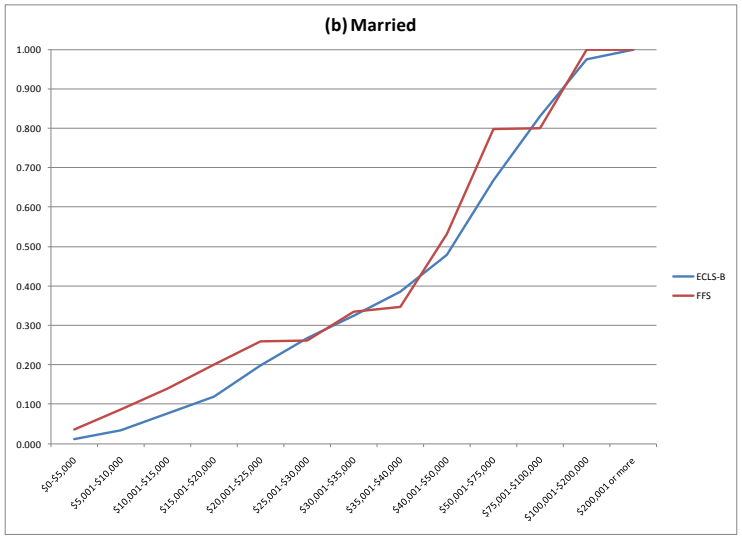
	Married to Father		Cohabiting with Father		Neither Married nor Cohabiting with Father	
	ECLS-B	FFS	ECLS-B	FFS	ECLS-B	FFS
Child						
Low Birthweight	0.072*	0.042	0.088	0.086	0.099	0.131
	(0.004)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.015)	(0.006)	(0.021)
Mother						
Health Status						
Excellent Health	0.414	0.361	0.347**	0.238	0.294	0.284
	(0.015)	(0.031)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.017)	(0.034)
Very Good Health	0.337	0.371	0.270**	0.379	0.318	0.390
	(0.013)	(0.035)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.020)	(0.031)
Good Health	0.202	0.209	0.263	0.284	0.291	0.254
	(0.011)	(0.032)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.026)
Fair or Poor Health	0.047	0.059	0.119	0.099	0.097	0.072
	(0.006)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.013)	(0.016)
*Father**						
Health Status						
Excellent Health	0.242**	0.356	0.173***	0.299	--	--
	(0.013)	(0.041)	(0.025)	(0.029)	--	--
Very Good Health	0.424	0.387	0.350	0.384	--	--
	(0.018)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.033)	--	--
Good Health	0.285*	0.216	0.352*	0.231	--	--
	(0.019)	(0.028)	(0.037)	(0.032)	--	--
Fair or Poor Health	0.049	0.040	0.125	0.086	--	--
	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.025)	(0.019)	--	--

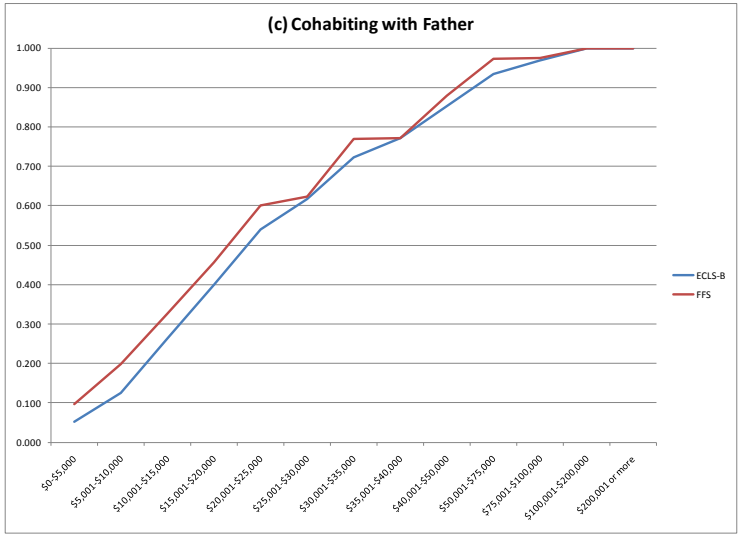
Note: Significance tests indicate differences between the ECLS-B Large City Subsample and Fragile Families Study National Sample.
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

[a] Health status information not available for non-resident fathers in ECLS-B.

Figure 1: Cumulative Probability Distribution for Household Income, By Family Type: Cities with Populations of 200,000 or More







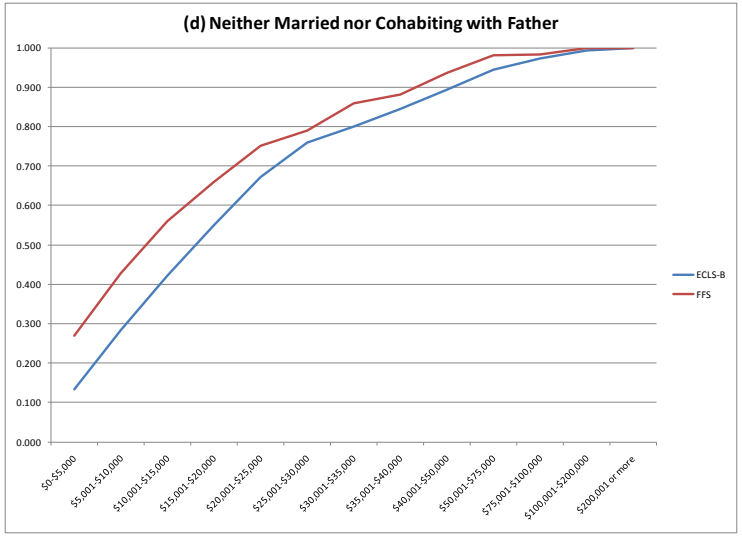


Figure 2: Cumulative Probability Distribution for Fathers' Earnings, By Family Type: Cities with Populations of 200,000 or More